

Good Morning! This is the Sunday in the church year traditionally known as ‘Trinity Sunday’. It always comes on the Sunday right after Pentecost. In the church season called Advent, which usually starts around the first of December, we focus on God the Father speaking through His prophets regarding the coming of His Son. At Christmas, of course, we focus on the birth of God the Son, Jesus Christ. The next few months focus on the life of God the Son, including His death and resurrection. And then Pentecost, which we celebrated last Sunday, marks the giving of God the Holy Spirit. So now in the church calendar year, having in a sense received God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, we commemorate this day as Trinity Sunday.

And, as you might expect, all the readings reflect our God in three persons. But I want to focus especially on the passage from Isaiah.

But before we really get into Isaiah, I want you to think about the process of getting to know someone; you spend the first little bit chit-chatting around the surface, maybe you share a common interest or two. But, it usually doesn’t take too long before you reach a plateau in that relationship; you don’t want to open yourself up too much in that friendship until you know that person’s character – what they’re *really* like, can they be trusted?

This passage in chapter 6 is Isaiah’s account of the incredible event in his life when God called him to be a prophet, to speak God’s words to His people. And in allowing us to peer into this dramatic event, God has given you and me a chance to see what He’s *really* like, to see that we can trust Him.

The passage begins “In the year that King Uzziah died” – That’s in the neighborhood of about 740 BC. But did anybody notice that Isaiah’s calling happens in chapter 6? Has he been speaking out of turn in the first 5 chapters? No, he’s been recounting the spiritual condition of Israel under the reign of King Uzziah. And let me tell you, it’s not a pretty picture. The nation of Judah has experienced great growth and prosperity under Uzziah, prosperity and wealth not known since the days of King Solomon. But also under Uzziah’s reign the people of God, have turned their backs on God; they’ve been disobedient and idolatrous; they’ve become spiritually lazy and put their trust in their wealth. Now that may describe someone you know! But it was no different then. And so right from the start of this passage we see the glaring contrast between King Uzziah, who has died after leading his people to spiritual corruption, and the Eternal King, the Lord of hosts, who will never die and will rescue all of His people who are willing to be rescued from their certain spiritual death.

So in the year that King Uzziah died, Isaiah sees a vision of the Lord, sitting upon a throne, the rightful seat of a Sovereign King, and he was high and lifted up – the King of Kings. And the train of his robe ... *filled* the temple.

I was still young when Prince Charles and Lady Diana were married in 1981, but I still remember Diana’s train as she walked down the aisle of St. Paul’s Cathedral. You can actually find the video of it online. 25 feet long – when she stepped out of the horse-drawn carriage and walked toward the church you kept waiting for the end of the gown to get out of the carriage. Like one of those clown handkerchiefs. It was very impressive.

And yet as glorious and elegant a display of her newfound royalty as this was, the train of her bridal gown didn't quite fill the Cathedral's aisle.

When Isaiah saw the Lord seated on his throne, high and lifted up, the train of his robe – not a bridal gown, but a robe of royal rule – the train *filled the WHOLE temple!!!*

And *angels* were flying around, calling out to one another, delighting together in the praise of God – Holy, Holy, Holy! Three 'holy's for the God in three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, Holy, Holy, Holy! Is the Lord of hosts – the whole earth is full of his glory. And their praise was thunderous, shaking the temple's foundation, as the smoke of incense billowed in.

Now we might expect such an encounter to be exciting and exhilarating, filled with joy! But remember the reign of King Uzziah and the utter contrast between the unrighteousness of the people of Israel and the righteous Lord, high and lifted up. Isaiah remembered this contrast, because he had lived under Uzziah's rule, and he's terrified. And all he can do is prostrate himself before the Lord and call out 'Woe is me!' See, standing in the presence of holiness, he is *stricken* with the reality of his own UN-holiness, with the reality that he is just as guilty of offending God's laws as everybody else in the first 5 chapters of his book. Standing before God, there's no finger-pointing at others, no trying to justify his own actions. Scholar Barry Webb writes, "It is not comparison to others, but the holiness of God which reveals *to us* our true condition." **(2X)** Trembling with fear, face down before God, Isaiah sees himself for who he really is and cries out, "I'm a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of people of unclean lips" – which is not simply to say that he has a foul mouth, but that he has a foul heart, and so do his people. And he knows intuitively that this disqualifies him from being allowed into God's presence – because God is Holy, and he is not – yet here he is, in the midst of holiness and thunderous praise that shakes the foundations and smoke everywhere... and he's terrified; he knows he has no right to be here.

Judgment is what's expected and deserved, ...but Grace is what's given instead.

One of the angelic seraphim takes a hot coal off of the altar, remember the altar is the place of sacrifice, and touches the very lips that Isaiah confessed to be unclean, and the angel says to him, "your guilt is taken away, and your sin forgiven." Cleansing, forgiveness, undeserved but freely offered, from God's own altar of sacrifice.

Isaiah is a picture of what is offered to the nation of Israel in his own day and to all of us now in ours – confess your sins and be forgiven through God's sacrifice. Isaiah reached that place where he realized that 'I'm OK, you're OK' doesn't work – because we're not OK. We may be nice, successful, good-looking, even happy, but spiritually, we need an intervention. We need Grace.

Judgment is what's deserved, but Grace is what's given instead.

Just as God cleansed and forgave Isaiah from the altar of sacrifice, so we are cleansed and forgiven by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the Cross. Our only part in that

transaction is confession. Notice that each time *before* we come to the altar to take Communion, where we believe God to be present in the bread and wine, we confess our sins. Every time. And then, at least in Rite I, we say again

(8&10:45: We are not worthy so much as to gather up the crumbs under His table, but He is the same Lord whose property is always to have mercy)

(9:15: We are not worthy even to gather up the crumbs under His table; yet He is the same Lord whose nature is always to have mercy)

And every time, we are graciously allowed into His presence to cry out with the angels, “Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!”

This is the God who wants us off the plateau in our relationship with Him and wants to take us to new heights, not merely to know Him mechanically on Sunday mornings but to know him with increasing depth and vibrancy - all day every day; this is the God who’s tired of the chit-chat on the surface, who’s ready to be trusted with the wounds in our souls and the skeletons in our closets. *Judgment is what’s deserved, but Grace will be what’s given.* We see it here and all through the pages of Scripture. I can also tell you that this truth has born out time and again in my own life: the more I’ve dared to reveal to Him the things I’m afraid of or ashamed of, the more Grace I’ve been given. The more I realize and confess my own unworthiness to be in His holy presence, the more in awe of Him I become, and the more in awe of Him I become, the more I want to be in His presence. It’s the times I let myself get distracted by earthly and temporary things that I lose my awe and forget my unworthiness. Which means its time to confess, and I can trust that because of the Cross, I’ll be ushered right back in.

Judgment is what’s deserved, but Grace is what’s given. That’s what Isaiah found, that’s what I’ve found, and that’s what you’ll find too. I promise.

Amen.